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NAVAL FORCES IN THE MEDITERRANEAN SCENE OF A POTENTIAL
CONFRONTATION (SEE (U) NAVAL INTELLIGENCE SUPPORT
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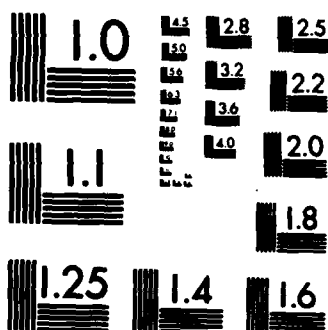
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SEESTREITKRAFTE IM MITTELMEER
SCHAUPLATZ EINER MOGLICHEN
KONFRONTATION

AUTHOR: GIUSEPPE DIGIOVANNI

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NAVAL FORCES IN THE MEDITERRANEAN SCENE OF A POTENTIAL CONFRONTATION

[diGiovanni, Giuseppe; Seestreitkräfte im Mittelmeer Schauplatz einer möglichen Konfrontation; Marine-Rundschau, 1983/12; pp. 538-541; German]

Giuseppe di Giovanni, Vice Admiral, Commander of the Allied Naval Force Southern Europe

In this column prominent personalities from politics, the armed forces, industry, technology, and science regularly state their views on current maritime issues in their areas.

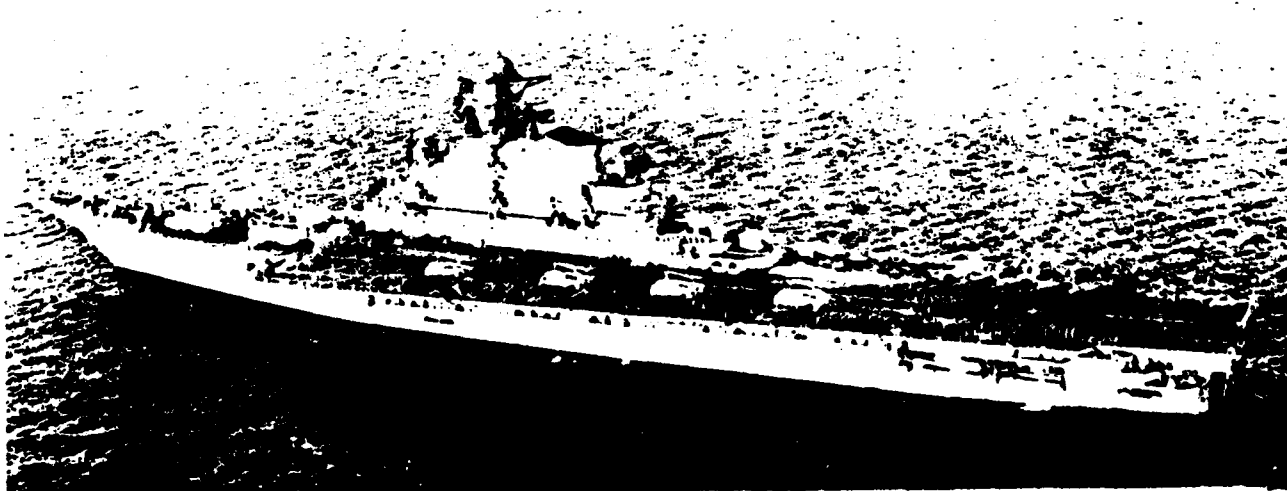


THE MEDITERRANEAN

The political and strategic importance of the Mediterranean has often been emphasized by those who have undertaken a study of this fascinating corner of the world with an objective attitude. /538*

The history of the Western world has occurred there and has tarried along these coasts. Now even some of the greatest economic, social and political problems are being projected here and wait their possible solution there.

Three continents, 17 nations and more than 325 million people confront each other here, live there and are associated with this sea; countries with different economic and political importance, with extremely different standards of living, cultural heritage and different religions, unresolved problems and conflicts and in some cases with unstable internal political situations and unpredictable attitudes and reactions.



The Soviet V/STOL carrier KIEV in the Mediterranean
Photo: Italian Navy

*Numbers in right margins indicate pagination in the original text.

In this scenario NATO plays a critical role: NATO is of critical importance for the Mediterranean, and the Mediterranean is critical for the survival of NATO. It should suffice to consider the fact that approximately one third of the population of the European countries of Europe lives in Southern Europe and is almost completely dependent for its existence upon the shipping routes. I will not refer further to figures and statistics in regard to the extent of the trade to qualify the economic importance of of this "crossroad" at sea. These facts are generally known. I will cite merely a few figures:

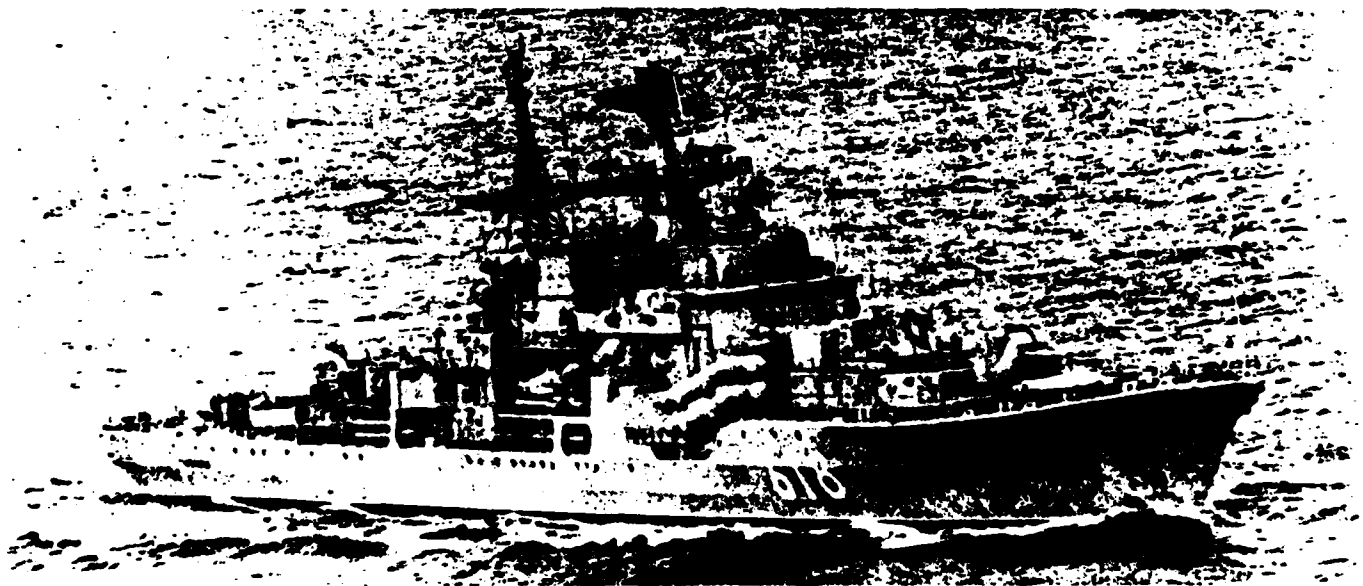
The passage of merchant marine ships through the Straits of Gibraltar and the Suez Canal amounts to 150 and 180 ships per day and the average daily frequency of ships of large tonnage in the Mediterranean is approximately 2,000 units.

In this regard it should be noted that this does not include only the West, but also for example Warsaw Pact countries: the most important in this regard are the Bulgarian and Rumanian exports and 40% of the Russian exports which pass through the Mediterranean.

THE OTHERS

For almost twenty years after the end of WWII only a few naval ships of the Warsaw Pact entered the Mediterranean and this activity was always normal passage to the Black Sea, the Atlantic and the Indian Ocean.

Since 1973 the Soviets decided as a result of their policy of showing the flag and the expansion of their Navy to reinforce their naval presence in the Mediterranean. Initially ships were assigned only for a short time and limited number and usually returned to the Black Sea without having put into Mediterranean ports.



The modern Soviet guided missile cruiser SOVREMENNYI in its first passage into the Mediterranean.

Photo: Italian Navy

When the Soviet naval presence later increased, its dependence upon bases in Egypt and Syria increased considerably. The termination of the fifteen year treat of cooperation with the Soviet Union by Egypt aggravated with dramatic urgency the problem of logistical support from land bases for the Soviet Eskadra in the Meditteranean (SOVMEDRON) and promoted the development of a strong naval component for mobile logistical supply at sea.

The Soviet naval presence in the Mediterranean reached its highest in October 1973 during the Yom Kippur War. It reached the considerable number of 98 units of combat and auxiliary ships. In recent years the SOVMEDRON has stabilised at a total number, which is between 40 and 60 units, with seasonally occurring variations: fewer ships in the winter months with a tendency to exploit the the favourable climatic conditions in the spring and summer with a more numerous and active presence.

From a quantitative perspective, it appears that the extent of the Soviet fleet units in peacetime is stabilized at:

- 9 - 10 submarines
- 10 - 14 surface combatants
- 10 - 20 auxiliary ships
- 4 - 6 reconnaissance and special research ships.

The SOVMEDRON is therefore today a extraordinarily well balanced fleet unit in its components. It consists of modern ships equipped with sophisticated and "credible" weapon systems and is an expression of the renovation and development realized in the Soviet Navy in recent years: the development of a navy intended for coastal defense to a navy for worldwide missions at sea with great combat power.

The frequent, repeated and periodic appearance of the VTOL carriers KIEV, MINSK and NOBOROSIJSK with their naval aviation component on board has demonstrated that the Soviets are also capable of exercising the "third dimension" of their sea power in the Mediterranean; and all of this of course supplements the progressively more frequent operations of the multi-purpose aircraft of the MAY type (RVAH and ASW) and the potential threat by the BACKFIRE bombers of the Soviet naval aviation units stationed in the Crimea.

But the Soviets are not the only naval presence in the Mediterranean: Until just a few years ago the Mediterranean litoral states of the Third World Countries had only insignificant naval forces, but a considerable expansion of their navies is occurring now.

The Algerian Navy has acquired 2 frigates of the KONI class and 3 guided missile corvettes of the NANUCHKA-II Class and has thereby considerably increased its limited offensive capability, which until that time had been vested in the old fast attack missile craft of the KOMAR and OSA types. Tunisia and Libya have purchased fast attack missile craft of the LA COMBATTANTE type. Particularly Libya has manifested interest in the naval area and has acquired 4 guided missile corvettes of the ASSAD Class built in Italy. ex-WADI Class, 4 NANUCHKA-II guided missile corvettes and 6 submarines of the FOXTROT Class.

There are justified doubts in regard to whether these countries are capable of operating these very modern systems which they have acquired without appropriate foreign assistance and of maintaining them. For some countries this requirement is troublesome, difficulty to satisfy and is a permanent problem.

NATO

The Mediterranean countries which belong to NATO are completely aware of the development of the situation. Plans and programs are in a more or less advanced stage of realization in order to maintain an acceptable equilibrium of the forces.

At first glance the situation does not appear to be very optimistic. One country, Great Britain, has completely withdrawn its forces from the Mediterranean, although it remains actively represented in the staffs of the NATO command agencies and participates in the largest exercises on an irregular basis with ships and resources. Nevertheless, the balance is still in favour of NATO, and not only on a numerical basis: the fleets in

the Mediterranean in various ways and despite the very great difficulties imposed by the current fiscal constraints have initiated renovation and modernization programs, which in some instances are very respectable.

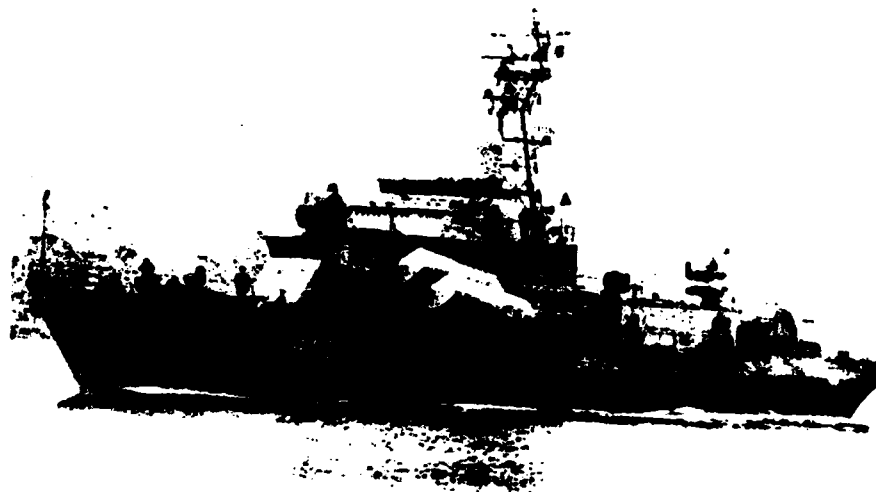
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In addition to its guided missile helicopter cruisers VITTORIO VENETO, DORIA AND DUILIO, the Italian Navy has just launched its first through-deck carrier, the GARIBALDI. This is a ship with extraordinarily modern characteristics and features for a very wide range of operational capabilities. The more modern ARDITO and AUDACE have joined the guided missile destroyers of the IMPAVIDO Class, while the frigates of the MAESTRALE Class have followed the frigates of the first series of the LUPO Class. These are units which are intended for operations in the Mediterranean, but which have also realized considerable success in the commercial context with other countries.

In addition to the now obsolescent former US destroyers, the Greek Navy is currently in the process of realizing a program which has already begun of acquiring new frigates of the KORTENAER Class, and the Turkish Navy has recently ordered new frigates (MEKO-200) to support the old US destroyers of the TEPE Class.

In regard to light naval combatants, the Greek fast attack missile craft of the LA COMBATTANTE Class and the Turkish fast attack missile craft of the KARTAL and DOGAN Classes are valuable components, which are intended particularly for operations in the narrow waters of the Aegean. The now advanced building program of hydrofoil fast attack missile craft of the SPARVIERO Class by the Italian Navy merits special mention. These are hyper-modern units, which have demonstrated that they have amazing capabilities, despite the fact that the period of their operation and testing may still be too short.

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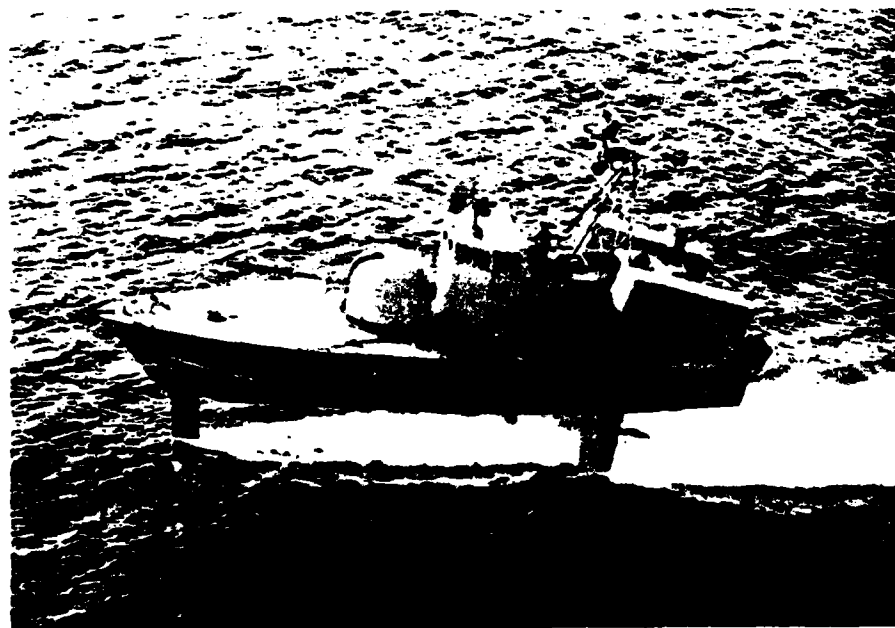
The guided missile corvettes of the NANUCHKA Class are a new threat in the Mediterranean, which the Soviet Union has provided to Algeria, Libya and now Syria; here the EAN MARA (416) delivered in October 1981.

In regard to submarines, the new conventional Italian SAURO Class and the most recent purchases and constructions of the Greek and Turkish Navies (IKL 209) are a reassuring predication for a modernization and reinforcement in this area.



The Italian guided missile frigates of the MAESTRALE Class (above the lead ship) and the Italian hydrofoil fast attack missile craft of the SPARVIERO (below the lead ship) play a major role among the new ships which are now being added to NATO naval forces. Photo: Archiv BfZ)

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In regard to naval aviation it can be noted: A large percentage of the NATO units in the Southern Area is capable of carrying ASW-helicopters on board, of which the majority of such helicopters is the latest design and most modern models. The on-board helicopter component is quantitatively and qualitatively still being further developed.

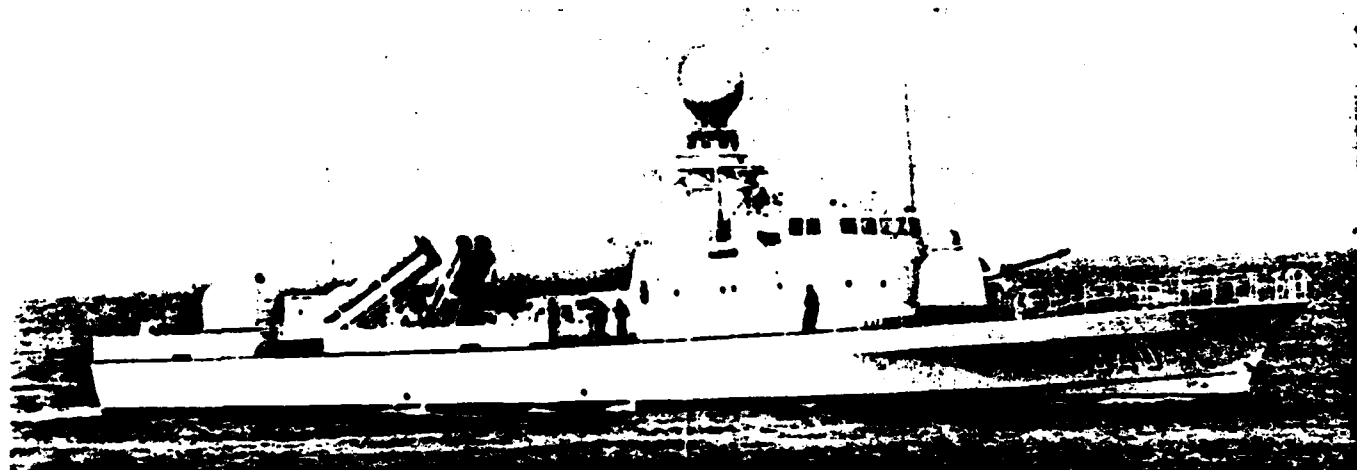
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Surveillance and ASW-detection missions at long range are assigned to naval reconnaissance aircraft, such as the Italian and French ATLANTIC, the AMERICAN P3 ORION and sporadically the English NIMROD, which are equipped with modern devices.

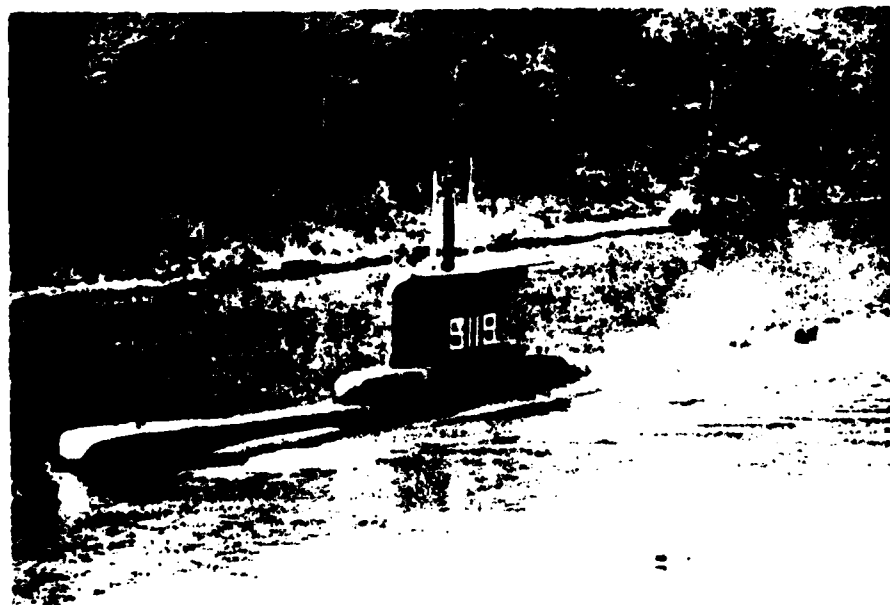
However, that factor which actually constitutes the difference in combat power and efficiency between the naval forces of NATO and those of the Soviets in the Mediterranean is the presence of units of STRIKFORSOUTH.

The military potential, which is contained in the battle groups, whose core are the nuclear-powered aircraft carriers, forms such a deterrent, that the balance in the Mediterranean is still in favour of the West.

The French Navy is also included in this balance of forces. It is a modern and well equipped force. both in regard to surface forces and submarines. and the future replacement of the two aircraft carriers FOCH and CLEMENCEAU by more modern ships, which is projected for the 1990's, will generate a decisive improvement of the balance of forces in the Mediterranean. Also, the gradual and desired integration of the Spanish Navy, which itself is experiencing a phase of critical modernization, into NATO is grounds for realistic optimism.



The Greek and Turkish Navies continue to acquire modern fast attack missile craft; above the Turkish Lürssen FPB-57 fast attack missile craft DOGAN (P 340) with HARPOON missiles (as in the Greek COMBATTANTE-III) and below the Greek IKL-209 submarine PONTOS (S119) (similar to the Turkish ATILAY Class).



CONCLUSIONS

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In a potential theater of military operations with such great economic and strategic importance, in which however the political instability and the opposing ethnic, economic and political factors create numerous points of friction and sources of conflict which can threaten peace, an effective naval presence can play an important stabilizing and preventive role and certainly contribute to restricting the expansion of such conflicts.

The naval forces of the NATO South area countries are not only an instrument of war, but can and must operate beyond the issue of balancing the political influence of the SOVMEDRON in such a manner, that the Mediterranean remains a communications route, which is safe and open for merchant traffic. They contribute to maintaining friendly relations with the countries of North Africa. Our mission is to act in such a manner, that the North-South axis in the Mediterranean remains a safe route for the connection and the cooperation between the industrial nations of the Northern shore of the Mediterranean and the coastal countries of North Africa.

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